

# Thought for the Day 2005

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## Thought for the Day - 2005 No. 1

"Beware as to whom you keep company with" = *asevanā ca bālānaṃ*. This is the first word of advice the Buddha gave to the deity who came to him on behalf of gods and men to inquire as to what kind of behavior brings about success in life. Today, I give this to you, to every mother and father in the home, as something that they must have the courage to communicate to every member of the family, both young and old, male and female.

It is an honest and sincere advice, so that none, you or yours, gets contaminated in the company of morally infected associates, both men and women, whose numbers in our society keep rapidly increasing. By moral we mean nothing supersonic. It is just acceptable decent behavior of humans, of men and women, in the company of humans. This is in a way a safeguard against what is known today as peer pressure, particularly to our younger ones at school going age.

Its prevalence is by no means among only school goers. Wherever group identity is discernible, at school, university, or work place, we know its membership, both men and women equally well, brings pressure on one another to act together in connivance, whatever be their chosen activity, no matter whether it is good or bad. One has therefore to be cautious about membership in such groups, developing adequate buffer zones, in order to safeguard one's chosen identity, in terms of one's religion and culture. This is where parents have to impress, and we say impress adequately on their children the worth of their cherished convictions, shared by the family.

Group identities alone, without respectful acceptance of seniority, are invariably bound to be too weak to provide the necessary leadership in society. Experientially built up wisdom of any group, even in an age of internationalism,

we believe it is too perilous to brush aside. Discrete and discriminating assimilation is far safer in social stratification than cussed displacement. Hence Buddhism is seen to uphold *jeṭṭhāpacāyana* or respect of seniority as a virtue which contributes immensely to social solidarity.



## Thought for the Day - 2005 No. 2

"Respect is an inalienable virtue in human society" = *pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṃ*. The word of the Buddha in the Maṅgala Sutta upholds this virtue. It means showing due respect to those who deserve it. It is implied once again in another word *gāravo* which comes from the same source.

This virtue operates in society where humans recognize seniority in age or greater merit in persons like one's parents or teachers or even elders in the family groups. In our Buddhist thinking, such persons who are in our midst in the human community deserve to be dutifully honoured and respectfully attended on. [The Pali language uses several appropriate words such as *vandati*, *namassati* to indicate this attitude of respect of humans towards humans, each according to what they deserve from the other.

The Anguttara Nikaya, for example, puts this behaviour of children towards their parents as *Tasmā hi te namasseyya sakkareyyā 'tha paṇḍito* = Therefore a wise person should show respect to his parents and attend on them well [AN. I. 132]. To the Buddhist, this veneration of humans by humans, on account of each one's relative worth, implies no diminishing of personal prestige or esteem or personality impoverishment. On the other hand, Buddhists are never made to kneel down before believed-in divine beings of any sort, in veneration or fear. For the Buddhists, only the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha stand above them as objects of veneration.

New trends in philosophy and psychology now developing in the western world are sponsoring **respect** as a primary human virtue in which growing up young humans, of any brand any where, must be rooted as they commence their growth into worthy manhood and womanhood. Few in this part of the self-flattering world know about these new courageous changes with regard to value orientation.

Three new R's, replacing the old ones of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic in the ancient school curriculum are now triumphantly emerging in the western world. They are Respect, Responsibility and Readiness to learn. These values like **respect** and **responsibility** which have been a part of our cultural heritage have to be retrieved and re-established in Sri Lanka.

We believe the best governance of a state must essentially begin by re-educating its youth, first in their own cultural values, and that in their own homes. It is your turn now, O parents. Please come forward. Leave the State alone.



## Thought for the day 2005 - No. 3

*Bāhusaccañ ca sippañ ca* of the Maṅgala Sutta which means 'wisdom and skills' is possibly the broadest definition of education one could get any where, any time. Wisdom acquired through 'much hearing in' is what **bāhu-sacca** stands for. Within its territory, it is capable of educating both the head and the heart. What men thought seriously in their heads, they expressed to others in words. The heard word or *śruti* [*sutam* in Pali] thus turned out to be the nursery where wisdom grew. The dignity and the worth of him who transmitted this learning mattered a great deal in the composition of wisdom.

*Sippam*, on the other hand, means the skills one acquires. In his day to day life, man needs a wide range of such skills. But today's technological

development has enabled man to transfer most of these into the hands of machines. Robots can now be employed by man as headless slaves to do for him many unseemly jobs as well, which are not very flattering to the very name human.

The above quote insists, unwittingly though, man's need for a balanced education in life where skills are not be left in the hands of humans without a capacity to judge. This capacity to judge has to be non-fragmented wisdom of man which is globally humane and magnanimous, without partisan loyalties or humiliating submission to segmented areas of immense power. In such neutrality of judgement alone shall lie the salvation of man.

Buddhism wisely stigmatizes such knowledge and fore-warns us that such knowledge stands for the ruination of the unwise man.

*Yāvad' eva anathāya ñattaṃ bālassa jayate  
hanti bālassa sukkaṃsaṃ muddhaṃ assa nipātayaṃ.*

Dhp. v. 72

Think of the laboratory-acquired knowledge which created the bomb which brought unimaginable death and disaster upon Hiroshima. We invite you who are parents, and whom we believe have a serious concern for the welfare of your children, to come forward. Beware of what new thinking our educational set-ups pipe in today as items of knowledge, unmindful of the consequences they bring in their wake.



## Thought for the day 2005 - No. 4

Our theme today is 'Being satisfied within one's limitations, limitations which one cannot justifiably break through.' One calls this mind-set contentment or

***santutthī***. The Maṅgala Sutta presents it as a life-enriching attitude, contributing to success: *sabbattha-m-aparājitā*. It means ` **Endowed with such virtues, one shall never fail in life.**

Our Buddhist texts say that `Even a downpour of gold coins from heaven will not quench **the thirst of those who keep chasing after pleasures**': *na kahāpanavassena titti kāmesu vijjati* [Dhp. v. 186]. While being **still unsatiated in his thirst, death will overtake such a man**: *atittam eva kāmesu antako kurute vasam* [Dhp. v. 48].

What is denounced here is both lustful greed and escalating ambition with an endless sense of acquisition or achievement. Even where it could be a peaceful and contented life in the home for a man or woman, unbridled quest for extras elsewhere is frowned upon in Buddhism as a despicable breach of social propriety. For more details please see the Parābhava Sutta of the Suttanipāta [Sn. vv. 91-115].

On the contrary, contentment in any and every area of life offers to people of culture and good breeding more joy than any summit of affluence could ever do [*santutthī paramam dhanam*: Dhp. v. 206].

As we make these studies on the **preparation of humans for ascendance on the path towards their liberation in Nirvana**, we feel the need all the time to make Buddhist teachings like those in the Maṅgala sutta more and more a reality in our homes rather than sterilising them as ritualistic chants via the cassette trade of the market place. We plead with you. Please come forward to achieve this end. The Sutta's own request is

Having perfected these virtues listed herein  
one shall always be victorious everywhere.  
And shall always be in blissful comfort.  
This shall be their greatest success.

*Etādisāni katvāna sabbattha m'aparājītā  
sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti taṃ  
tesaṃ maṅgalaṃ uttamaṃ.*

Sn. v. 269



## Thought for the day 2005 - No. 5

A man of good breeding reflects a great deal of self-composure or calmness of manner. It is even more than that. He has established himself according to a well approved and well accepted way of discipline. We refer to this quality of life as ***atta-sammā-panidhi***. We are indeed not far from the truth if we say that such a man of good breeding contains within himself all the virtues or ***maṅgalas***, thirty eight in number, which are listed in the little *sutta* by that name. We call this the Maṅgala Sutta, the sutta of success generators. It is indeed meant to be that.

In Buddhist religious thinking, culture is what a human should be as man or woman, worthy of the brand name human. And as our Buddhist books say it is because of **the more developed state of mind** or *manassa ussannatāya manussā* that the humans are placed far ahead of animals which act on reflexes. Man does think on his own and does make judgements relevant to every new situation he has to face. He never has to pray to another to be enabled to think. Or to be salvaged whenever he fails to think and bungles. This is what is meant by **well established stability** in life or ***atta sammā panidhi*** in terms of Buddhist thinking.

The bedrock of this is soundness of judgement. Where does this come from? Never from the State which has continually to be a product of good judgement which it rarely turns out to be. This is why books of great sanity like RELIGION, THE MISSING DIMENSION OF STATECRAFT [Ed. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson] come to written. Religion alone can inculcate the necessary detachment for the acquisition of this honourable position of being able to judge.

'One has to be free from likes and dislikes. Be under no pressure or threats from anywhere. Vested interests shout not cloud one's vision.' This applies equally well to the State and the people there in. Buddhism puts it as - *Chandā dosā bhayā mohā yo dhammaṃ nātivattati.*

But without there ever being the possibility of the State buying up religion or religion ever attempting to buy up the State. There needs to be all the time the dignified detachment between the two. There should never be the need for any stupid separation of these Siamese twins. Any attempt at it would invariably end up calamitously in disaster.



## Thought for the day 2005 No. 6

For a Buddhist we would consider self-assessment or self-scrutiny to be a vital ingredient in life. One does measure oneself in relation to others, with regard to their being good or bad in terms of Buddhist standards. This measurement for self-correction is referred to as *attanā 'va attānaṃ anuminitabbaṃ*, i.e. one must measure oneself by oneself [Anumāna Sutta at MN. I. 97].

This is how one does it. He determines for himself that 'This person is evil in character and is given to evil ways of living. He is invariably disagreeable and unpleasant to me.' Then he says to himself: 'If I would become like that, then I too would be disagreeable to others.' Realising this, he would refrain from being so. This **self-standard religious thinking** in Buddhism is spoken of as the *attūpanāyika dhamma-pariyāya* [SN. V. 353] and is used in all areas of ethical correction as in *attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye*. This means 'Putting oneself in the self same position of the other, one should not kill, nor cause others to kill.'

One must note here the very vital philosophical import of **the concept of self**

in Buddhism. Side by side with the unambiguous rejection, with its theory of ***anatta***, of an eternal unchanging religio-metaphysical self called a soul or ***ātman***, ultimately related to a creator God or a primary source of cosmic power called Brahman, Buddhism unhesitatingly **admits the reality of the existence of conditionally generated *samsāric* beings**, with their own identity and their personal responsibility for what they do [*yathā kammūpage satte*].

In Buddhism, both ***dukkha*** or suffering in *samsāric* continuance and ***sukha*** or ***nibbānic bliss*** in being liberated therefrom are personal and individual. These are achievements brought about by humans themselves, by each one for himself or herself, without any assistance sought from elsewhere. They are themselves responsible for them.

*Attanā 'va kataṃ pāpaṃ attanā saṅkilissati  
 attanā akataṃ pāpaṃ attanā 'va visujjhati  
 suddhī asuddhī paccattaṃ  
 nāñño m'aññaṃ visodhaye*

Dhp. v. 165

